

# A cri de coeur delivered with wit, simplicity and learning

**D**inah Livingstone launched her latest collection of poems at Torriano Meeting House on Sunday, May 4, keeping alive a tradition she started some years ago, of launching her work at Torriano as close to Labour Day as possible.

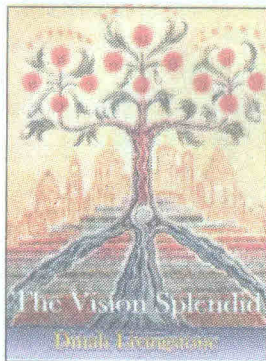
There was standing room only for Dinah, and many there were past pupils of hers who now make up a significant proportion of working London poets.

And Dinah is very much a London poet – her work infused with other poets – particularly William Blake, whom she quotes at length – who have written about London.

She loves London and welcomes the different voices that rise up through her labyrinthian streets. To her, ethnic diversity is a “proper London mixture”.

Dinah wears her learning lightly and makes connections between the ancient world and today with wit and simplicity as in this short poem about an “ordinary” old lady on a bus.

**Jehane Markham** is smitten by Dinah Livingstone’s new collection



## A Londoner

On the bus a laden old lady sat with her Jack Russell on her lap, who looked as English as the famous Nipper listening to His Master's Voice. 'What's your dog's name?' I asked. 'Archie,' which came as no surprise. Then she added 'Archimedes.'

I do a double take. 'Eureka!' She flashes me a smile alight with the intelligence of ancient Greece. Then I see her standing with her dog in Syracuse as that old mathematical philosopher streaks down the street.



famous, *The Trees Are Down*, written about the plane trees that were sawn down in the communal gardens that her house in Bloomsbury looked upon.

The book is threaded through with different voices; with references from the Bible, John Milton and Dante to an article from the *Guardian* – all are part of a great secular sermon that Dinah delivers on the sacredness of life itself with all its pain and difficulty.

Words form:

Let there be light to live, belong, to love unquenchably. The surge hums. Could it become a poem?

Dinah is a London Crier, ringing her bell of warning, ringing her bell of exultation. Crying for herself, when thwarted by age or pain, crying for London when its people are disregarded or its riches squandered. Kindness, work, love, these are the things that matter to her, matter to us all.

● *The Vision Splendid*. By Dinah Livingstone, *Katabasis*, £7.95.

She has an acute sense of human injustice and is enraged by carelessness, greed and the wanton destruction of nature.

In her title poem, Dinah laments the demise of a tree that she has known from her window, which is now obscured by an ugly new building.

It is only a sycamore tree but to her it is as protective as Yggdrasil, the evergreen ash tree; which in Norse mythology is known as the tree of life, stretching between heaven, earth and hell.

The poem reminded me of Charlotte Mew's